

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ORM-02 DHA-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05

H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 EB-08 OES-07 /081 W

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R 101232Z AUG 77

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5317

INFO AMEMNSUL CALCUTTA

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE NEW DELHI 11294

EO 11652: NA

TAGS: PFOR, SREF, IN, BG

SUBJ: PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE: FARAKKA AND BANGLADESH

REFUGEES

1. DURING THE RAJYA SABHA DEBATE ON FOREIGN POLICY

AUGUST 9 (SEPTEL), DEFENSE MINISTER JAGJIVAN RAM

REPORTEDLY SAID THAT WHILE THE GOI WOULD APPROACH THE

PROBLEM OF FARAKKA AS A NATIONAL ISSUE AND ENSURE

THAT THE CALCUTTA PORT WAS NOT PUT IN JEOPARDY, AN

AGREEMENT ON FARAKKA WOULD BE A TEST OF THE BILATERALISM

"WE ARE PREACHING" AS PART OF POSITIVE NON-ALIGNMENT

AND WOULD FURTHER THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FRIENDLY RELATIONS

WITH ALL INDIA'S NEIGHBORS. "LET FARAKKA NOT STAND IN THE

WAY OF OUR FRIENDSHIP," HE SAID. FRIENDSHIP WITH A

NEIGHBORING COUNTRY WAS SURELY OF MORE VALUE THAN

A "FEW CUSECS" ON THIS SIDE OR THAT SIDE. REJECTING

OPPOSITION CRITICISM OF THE BDG, RAM SAID THAT IT WAS

NONE OF INDIA'S BUSINESS TO COMMENT UPON THE INTERNAL

AFFAIRS OF BANGLADESH AND THAT PRESIDENT ZIA HAD

ASSURED THE GOI THAT BANGLADESH WANTED TO MAINTAIN

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FRIENDLY RELATIONS.

2. RAM SAID THAT SINCE THERE WAS NOT ENOUGH WATER FOR

THE REQUIREMENTS OF BOTH COUNTRIES, SHARING THE

SHORTAGE WOULD LEAD TO DISCONTENTMENT ON BOTH SIDES,

BUT THAT EACH GOVERNMENT MUST EXPLAIN TO ITS PEOPLE

WHY IT ACCEPTED LESS OF THE GANGES FLOW THAN IT NEEDED.

IN RAM'S VIEW, THIS TASK WOULD BE MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE BDG SINCE BEFORE FARAKKA BANGLADESH HAD RECEIVED 100 PERCENT OF THE FLOW. EXPERTS ON BOTH SIDES WOULD STUDY VARIOUS PROPOSALS, INCLUDING THE INDIAN SUGGESTION OF THE GANGES-BRAHMAPUTRA LINK CANAL, AND CHOOSE THE "MOST COST-EFFECTIVE SCHEME." RAM ALSO SAID THAT THE TWO COUNTRIES WOULD RESOLVE THE DIFFERENCES THEMSELVES, WITHOUT THE HELP OF ANY THIRD PARTY.

3. DURING THE DEBATE, CONGRESS AND CPI MEMBERS AGAIN RAISED THE CHARGE THAT THE GOI HAD PUSHED BACK INTO BANGLADESH POLITICAL REFUGEES, SOME OF WHOM WERE LATER JAILED OR KILLED. FOREIGN MINISTER A.B. VAJPAYEE DENIED THE CHARGE AND REPEATED THAT IT WAS INDIA'S DUTY TO GIVE POLITICAL ASYLUM TO ANY WHO SOUGHT IT BUT THAT SUCH PEOPLE WOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO ENGAGE IN POLITICAL ACTIVITY, AND LARGE NUMBERS COULD NOT BE PERMITTED TO CAMP ON THE BORDERS. VAJPAYEE SAID THAT THE GOI HAD ALREADY INVESTIGATED THESE COMPLAINTS AND FOUND THEM FALSE BUT WAS WILLING TO EXAMINE THEM ANEW.

4. COMMENT: JAGJIVAN RAM'S REMARKS ARE THE FRANKEST YET MADE BY THE DESAI ADMINISTRATION REGARDING ITS WILLINGNESS TO MAKE CONCESSIONS ON FARAKKA AND TO ACCEPT THE INEVITABLE ADVERSE DOMESTIC REACTION.

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RAM'S PLEA THAT AN AGREEMENT BASED ON MUTUAL SACRIFICE IS NECESSARY FOR THE GREATER GOOD OF FRIENDLY RELATIONS, HOWEVER, IS UNLIKELY TO QUIET OPPOSITION POLITICIANS WHO ARE HIGHLY CRITICAL OF PRESIDENT ZIA'S GOVERNMENT AND WHO MISS NO OPPORTUNITY TO ACCUSE THE GOI OF SELLING OUT INDIA'S INTERESTS TO BANGLADESH.

GOHEEN

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